



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by OSCE Head of Office in Baku

As delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 18, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To begin, I should like to take this opportunity if I may, to offer to the distinguished ambassador of Azerbaijan and his colleagues, on behalf of the government and people of the United States, our sincere condolences on the passing of former President Heydar Aliyev.

And then I would like to welcome Ambassador Burkhard back to the Permanent Council today also to congratulate him and his staff for their consistent dedication over the past six months, a period during which Azerbaijan held presidential elections.

As we have stated previously, the United States has serious concerns over the conduct of the elections as well as over the post-election violence and human rights abuses. I do not intend to repeat those concerns today, but I would like to commend Ambassador Burkhard for his follow-up with government officials on reports of abuses and reprisals against Azeri citizens.

As we noted in the Permanent Council here on November 20, the United States hopes the Government of Azerbaijan will review and implement the recommendations in the election report delivered by OSCE/ODIHR Director Ambassador Christian Strohal to the Government.

In the security dimension, Ambassador Burkhard and his staff have initiated some impressive projects. These include the police assistance program, and the organization of workshops and a conference to assist Azerbaijan in the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 on counter-terrorism.

We are also pleased to see the Office's focus on disseminating the OSCE's Code of Conduct for security personnel. More training in this area can, we believe, lead to greater respect for human rights.

Ambassador Burkhard is also to be commended for his office's work in the economic and environmental dimension. In particular, I should like to express our support for the office's focus on assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises and for its seminars

geared toward women and young people. Increasing the skills and capabilities of these target groups is, in our view, essential for sustained economic development and growth. It is especially important that we reach out to the youth who will build the Azerbaijan of the future.

Among the Office's many activities in the human dimension, assistance in strengthening and reforming the judicial system remains a high priority, and we are pleased with the emphasis that Ambassador Burkhard's office has placed on this issue. We look forward to implementation of the court trial monitoring program in the year 2004.

Ambassador Burkhard and his staff have similarly carried out important work in the area of freedom of the media. As he noted in his report, our mission here was glad to support a training workshop for journalists on "Managing Oil Wealth."

While we appreciate the importance of augmenting the professional capabilities of journalists in Azerbaijan, we also hope that the Azeri government will create an environment in 2004 in which journalists enjoy greater respect and more freedom from intimidation.

Finally, I would like to wish Ambassador Burkhard and his very capable staff a happy and fruitful holiday season and equal success in the year to come.

I thank you.